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A SECOND LOOK AT ASPECTS OF GANDHI'S THEORY OF NON-VIOLENCE

BY

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Gandhi's practice of non-violence as a technique to effect social and political change is well-known and it is not my intention to add to the immense literature on this subject. However, there is a paucity of critical literature on the theoretical aspects of non-violence. The purpose of this paper is to consider Gandhi's theory on the basis of non-violence, the meanings of violence and non-violence, and related methodological issues.

I

Unlike some thinkers who assume that man's violent behavior is phylogenetically based,[1] Gandhi affirms that man's unique position in evolution as a creature endowed with "reason, discrimination and free-will" and "moral instincts and moral institutions" makes the transfer of laws from animal behavior to man particularly hazardous.[2] For Gandhi non-violence is "the law of the human race."[3] It is important to understand what Gandhi means by this expression.

Firstly, according to Gandhi, man knows from "his innermost convictions" that he can subdue "desire, anger, ignorance, malice and other passions" that lead to violence. "Conquest of one's passions...is not super-human, but human."[4] Gandhi points his finger to one important aspect of violence, viz., that violence is the outgrowth of the passional side of man which can be checked and therefore violence is not instinctive.[5]

Secondly, man, for Gandhi, is both an individual-reality and communal-reality and it is love, not pressure or coercion, that binds men into a community. Our newspapers constantly portray a grim tale of violence; but such violence for Gandhi is an aberration, for millions live in peace and brotherhood.

> "History does not and cannot take note of this fact. History is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love or of the soul ...Soul-force, being natural, is not noted in history."[6]

Thirdly, Gandhi recognizes that frustration of human needs and aspirations as well as the powerful modern state are causes of violence. Much of violence has to be explained in these terms rather than as a product of innate agressiveness or as Freud puts it: "Home homini lupus."[7] As Gandhi proceeded with his non-violent campaigns, the economic restructuring of resources was uppermost in his mind; the basic needs of man have to be met and that is the truth of the human condition. "To a people famishing and idle," says Gandhi, "the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food and wages."[8] In Constructive Programme Gandhi sets forth in considerable detail his scheme for political, economic and educational reform of Indian society.[9]

However, unlike those who believe that economic and social engineering will allow the innate goodness of man to shine forth, Gandhi rightly posited a more realistic and a sounder image of man.

> "Man being by nature more passionate than the brute, the moment all restraint is withdrawn, the lava of unbridled passion would overspread the whole earth and destroy mankind. Man is superior to the brute inasmuch as he is capable of self-restraint and sacrifice, of which the brute is incapable."[10]

For Gandhi, it is in this positive capability for self-restraint--that man's nobler aspirations are not at the mercy of his irrational tendencies--and in his ability to devise means to regulate his resources that man will find the basis and hope of non-violence.

II

From the foregoing analysis wherein Gandhi argues for a moral discontinuum between man and animal, one would have expected Gandhi to define violence in terms of a violation of the person. A person, of course, can be violated in many ways and Gandhi points out that "the principle of ahimsa is hurt by every evil thought, by undue haste, by hatred, by wishing ill to anybody. It is also violated by our holding on to what the world needs."[11] However, in the only place where he offers a definition of violence, he does it in the following way:

> "Himsa means causing pain to or killing

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> any life out of anger, or from selfish purpose, or with the intention of injuring it. Refraining from so doing is ahimsa."[12]

Gandhi, unmindful of his distinction between man and animal, defines violence and non-violence through traditional Indian thought. Belief in reincarnation, no doubt, is a contributing factor in this definition of violence and non-violence.[13] This religious belief which is a fundamental assumption of the unity of all life, rather than an interconnectedness of the community of life, will profoundly influence Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence.

In spite of the above definition Gandhi recognizes that it is impossible to sustain one's body without the destruction of lower forms of life. Gandhi supports the killing of microbes by the use of disinfectants and the killing of monkeys which destroy food crops and fruits, carnivorous animals, poisonous snakes, rabid dogs, etc. But he notes paradoxically: "It is violence, yet a duty."[14] He then goes on to the resolution of the paradox by the recognition of our present embodied existence and a rigorous application of the desire to limit violence to all life.

In From Yeravda Mandir, which is a series of letters written to inmates of his ashram, Gandhi advises his followers to strive day by day towards this ideal of non-violence with their whole being.

> "In the place where we stand there are millions of micro-organisms to whom the place belongs and who are hurt by our presence there. What should we do then? Should we commit suicide? Even that is no solution, if we believe, as we do, that so long as the spirit is attached to the flesh, on every destruction of the body it weaves for itself another. The body will cease to be only when we give up all attachment to it...The body does not belong to us... Treating in this way the things of the flesh, we may one day expect to become free from the burden of the body."[15]

Apparently, Gandhi believes that the definitional paradox can be resolved by affirming a basic dualism of body and spirit which depreciates totally the ontological worth of the body so that Reality lies on the side of the spirit, and affirming this position as the Truth of the human condition. Practical necessity gives us a provisional truth which can and must be transcended by reducing oneself to "zero" as he tells us in his Autobiography.[16] What Gandhi fails to recognize is the repercussions this doctrine of man has on his theory of non-violence. Reading the Autobiography and From Yeravda Mandir, it becomes clear that Gandhi did not recognize that suppression of the legitimate joys of life can only explode into violence at some future date.

However, it must be noted that in Gandhi's educational writings another view, other than a spirit-attached-to-the-flesh model of man appears. "Man," says Gandhi, "is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required for making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education." And he continues:

> "I hold that true education of the intellect can only come through a proper exercise and training of the bodily organs...In other words an intelligent use of the bodily organs in a child provide the best and quickest way of developing his intellect. But unless the development of the mind and the body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lopsided affair. By spiritual training I mean education of the heart A proper and all around development of the mind, therefore can take place only when it proceeds pari passu with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole."[17]

By "training of the heart," Gandhi means that the child's potentialities for love and truth which are often smothered must be cultivated. "It should be essential of real education that a child should learn that in the struggle for life, it can conquer hate by love, untruth by truth, violence by self-suffering."[18]

The pull of this model of man is in another direction. This model preserves the ontological worth of the body and in principle maintains the moral discontinuum between man and animal.

III

Even though Gandhi discarded some features

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of the traditional Indian model of man insofar as they did not satisfy the demands of "heart" and "reason",[19] he retained other features, and these retained aspects lie at the heart of Gandhi's inconsistencies and paradoxes. In Gandhi's religious model of man, "the spirit is attached to the flesh," and the body is a "burden."[20] To break the chain of Karma and rebirth, "one must reduce (oneself) to zero."[21] "To attain perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech, and action; to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion."[22] Otherwise the atman "on every destruction of the body...weaves for itself another."[23] This religious model of man explains Gandhi's call for severe ascetism. "The quest for Truth involves tapas--self-suffering, sometimes even unto death. There can be no place in it, for even a trace of self-interest."[24]

Again in his religious model, Gandhi takes life as one, all life is one. This religious ideal calls for non-violence towards all living things. "We must strive," exhorts Gandhi, "day after day towards the ideal with what strength we have in us."[25] The necessities of man force Gandhi to make exceptions to this rule, but the religious ideal demands a struggle at every moment. "It is like balancing oneself on the edge of a sword."[26]

In Gandhi's other model of man, however, the unity of man is safeguarded and, thereby, the fundamental worth of the body recognized. "Man is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required."[27] A further distinguishing feature of this model is the radical difference in kind which it posits between man and brute.

> Man is higher than the brute in his moral instincts and moral institutions. The law of nature as applied to the one is different from the law of nature as applied to the other. Man has reason, discrimination, and free-will such as it is. The brute has no such thing. It is not a free agent, and knows no distinction between virtue and vice, good and evil.[28]

This difference in kind, according to Gandhi, morally justifies a difference in treatment of man and brute. In October of 1928 Gandhi was caught up in a controversy because he recommended the killing of monkeys which destroy crops. Some of his friends thought that this was a case of violence. Gandhi's response is illuminating.

> "There is a fundamental difference between the monkey nuisance and the human nuisance. Society as yet knows of no means by which to effect a change of heart in the monkeys and their killing may therefore be held as pardonable, but there is no evil doer or tyrant who need be considered above reform. That is why the killing of a human being out of self-interest can never find a place in the scheme of ahimsa."[29]

This model of man wherein the ontological worth of the body is recognized and a difference-in-kind between man and animal is posited is at variance with Gandhi's religious model wherein an undifferentiated metaphysical unity of life is posited and the ontological worth of the human body is totally depreciated. It is this unreconciled opposition between the two models of man that lies at the heart of Gandhian inconsistencies and paradoxes in the meaning of violence and non-violence.[30]

FOOTNOTES

1. Konrad Lorentz, On Agression (New York: Bantam, 1971), p. 229.

2. The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi ed. by Shriman Narayan (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1968), Vol. VI, p. 111 (hereinafter referred to as SW.)

3. SW, Vol. VI, p. 157.

4. The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (New Delhi: The Publications Division, Government of India, 1958-1974), Vol.XXX, p. 573. (Hereinafter referred to as CW.)

5. See Mahatma K. Gandhi, An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), pp. 276-279 for Gandhi's experiment's on the passional nature of man.

6. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj in SW, Vol. IV, p. 171.

7. Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents (London: Hogarth Press, 1946) p.8.

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8. Gandhi, Young India, 1919-1922 (New York: Huebsch, 1923), p. 670.

9. See Gandhi, Constructive Programme in SW, Vol. IV, pp. 335-374.

10. Sw, Vol. VI, p. 112.

11. Gandhi, From Yeravda Mandir in SW Vol. IV, p. 218.

12. CW, Vol. XXXI, p. 545.

13. Gandhi, An Autobiography, p. 136.

14. CW, Vol. XXXI, p. 545.

15. Gandhi, From Yeravda Mandir in SW Vol. IV, p. 218.

16. Gandhi, An Autobiography, p. 505.

17. SW, Vol. VI, pp. 506-07.

18. C.F. Andrews, Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 200.

19. In the sense of non-injury, ahimsa has long been a part of the Indian tradition, as old as the Upanishads. But it was understood as a negative concept as abstinence from injury, an ascetic virtue inculcated for the purpose of attaining salvation. On the social and political levels, the necessity of violence was accepted and even extolled in the Mahabharata. Gandhi reformulated this tradition in a three-fold way. Firstly he intimately relates non-violence to truth. If violence has the final say truth is the loser. Secondly, while in the traditional account, non-violence was interpreted in subordination to caste (war was a part of the warrior's duty), Gandhi subordinates caste to non-violence. Thirdly and most importantly, non-violence for Gandhi is a positive concept.

20. Gandhi, From Yeravda Mandir in SW, vol. IV, p. 218.

21. Gandhi, An Autobiography, p. 505.

22. Ibid., p. 504.

23. Gandhi, From Yeravda Mandir in SW, Vol. IV, p. 218.

24. Ibid., p. 215.

25. Ibid., p. 218.

26. Ibid., p. 216.

27. SW, Vol. VI, p. 506.

28. Ibid., p. 111.

29. CW, Vol. XXXVII. p. 362.

30. This paper has been limited to merely pointing out the source of Gandhi's inconsistencies as regards his theory of non-violence. I am not suggesting that one of the models of man should be rejected in favor of the other. In fact the usual definition of violence as 'violation of a person' assumes through the Biblical heritage that man alone is the only value of importance and that the rest of nature can be sacrificed for the welfare and pleasure of human beings; Gandhi's definition of violence as 'causing harm to any life' assumes the univocal unity of all life as a religious axiom and derives from it the doctrine of ahimsa (non-violence) as the prime ethical value. A fuller meaning of non-violence will involve a re-thinking over both these positions in terms of the evidence of the interconnectedness of the community of life which comes particularly from the biological sciences. A philosophical view of non-violence would involve a respect for the integrity of man and a respect for the integrity of biotic systems.

FREEDOM, MEANING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

BY

Jay Weinroth

I. Introduction

Issues centering on the nature of human freedom have a major bearing on our lives, socially and personally. The popular culture and the world of intellectuals as well are currently divided between two very opposite views concerning freedom. We are all familiar with these views. What may be called "the conventional view" is the older of the two, and it is anti-psychological. Its focus is the discipline of the home, the schoolroom, the law courts and prisons. Here conventional behavior is assumed to be freely chosen behavior. A simple,